

Pentecost7 / July 7, 2024

2 Corinthians 12:9

“My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

My Grace is sufficient

What does sufficient mean to you? Sufficient, according to common English usage, means to have enough. A sufficient amount of sleep may not be the optimum amount, but its enough. When an educational institution informs an applicant that their grades are sufficient for entry into the program it means they have met the minimum requirements for acceptance. It doesn't mean they are the top student. Others may be better qualified, but they are good enough. That's the common usage of sufficient, but its not the sense in which Christ uses the word in speaking to Paul, or in addressing any of our needs. His grace is much more than the bare minimum. It is His power for our salvation.

The word translated as 'power' is the word from which we get the words 'dynamo' and 'dynamite'. A dynamo is a powerhouse. Dynamite doesn't make a little bang when it explodes. Dynamite makes a big bang. Dynamite isn't a penny firecracker, sold at corner stores years ago that would make a little pop. Dynamite goes 'boom!' God's grace in Christ is sufficient, but its not a tiny firecracker. His grace is the power, the dynamo, the dynamite of our salvation, in time and for eternity. More than just enough, much more than the bare minimum, His grace is everything we need for life with Him in time and for eternity. "My grace is sufficient for you!"

The power, the dynamo, the dynamite of God's grace, is Christ Jesus. His grace is enough, but its more than just enough. When Jesus turned water into wine, He didn't make just enough for everyone to have a little sip to toast the bride. He told the attendants to fill six stone water jars containing twenty or more gallons. Not only did He transform it into wine, He transformed it into the best tasting wine this side of the heavenly banquet. When Jesus fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, there was more than just enough, more than enough for everyone to have a little. There was so much, the disciples collected twelve baskets of left overs for the local food bank. When Jesus told the disciples where to drop their nets for a catch of fish, the net wasn't a quarter full, half full or even filled. It was so full of fish it was almost breaking. The disciples struggled to haul it ashore. Jesus didn't do anything to the bare minimum. He did everything to the maximum, especially the working of our salvation, through the giving of Himself into death on the cross. His death took away not just some sins or the sins of some people. His death atoned for the sins of the whole world. His grace is sufficient to cover the sins of all people. His grace is the dynamite of salvation in the lives of those who believe.

His grace is greater and more powerful than any sin within us, or affliction that affects us from the outside. Speaking of the sin within us, St. Paul documented his own struggle with sin and the disappointment he felt when he failed and fell. He wrote in the letter to the Romans, "I am sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Almost in despair he asked, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Who? Who else, but Jesus Christ. His grace is sufficient. His grace is dynamite in the lives of those who believe.

St. Paul was no stranger to the afflictions of life. In the verses prior to our text, he relates some of the afflictions he suffered as an apostle of Christ. He was many times imprisoned. He was beaten so many times he lost count. He received forty lashes on five separate occasions. Once he was nearly stoned to death and three times he was shipwrecked. He spent a night and a day adrift on the open sea. Christ's grace was not just enough to get him through those things. His grace was the dynamo by which he came through those things. His grace was overflowingly sufficient to meet all his needs and more. Christ's grace is powerful to cover our sins. Christ's grace is powerful to lift us up when we fall. His grace is sufficient to bring us through every storm of life to the safe of haven of His Father's house. "My grace is sufficient for you!"

St. Paul was greatly blessed, both to know Jesus as Lord and to proclaim Him as Saviour as an apostle. He didn't know Jesus in His earthly ministry like the other apostles, who experienced Jesus in the form of a man and were taught by Him as their Rabbi. One of Paul's teachers, the Pharisee Gamaliel, encountered Jesus in Jerusalem and was familiar with His teaching. His testimony is recorded in the book of Acts. But apparently Paul wasn't in Judea and Galilee during the ministry of Jesus. Paul was blessed to know Jesus in His glory. Jesus called him to faith from a bright light in a divine appearance on the road to Damascus. Jesus personally called Paul to faith and commissioned Him to take His salvation to the Jews and Gentiles in the Roman world. Paul was blessed with special, singular revelations of Christ.

In our text Paul in the third person, relates an experience of being taken up to what he calls the third heaven, where he saw things beyond his comprehension and heard things, of which he was not permitted to speak. What he saw and heard, left him speechless, overwhelmed by the glory. That's why when he spoke about grace being sufficient, he wasn't talking about a little pop. He was talking about a big bang! Paul could have exalted himself as a special person, because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations given to him. Other people in Corinth, with lesser blessings, exalted themselves at the expense of others. Paul was a proud man by nature and by profession as a Pharisee. Perhaps he tended in that direction as he struggled with sin. But he didn't exalt himself over the least in the kingdom of heaven, because Christ gave him something, which he refers to as a thorn in his flesh, that kept him humble and grounded in the grace of Christ Jesus.

The identity of this thorn is unknown, but since it was in his flesh it was probably some bodily ailment, perhaps affecting his eyes. Paul dictated his letters, possibly because he couldn't see well enough to write. In the letter to the Galatians, he refers to a bodily ailment that was a trial to them. He says they loved him so much, they would have given him their eyes, if that were possible. Whatever it was, the nature of the thorn is less important than the effect it had on him spiritually; and the purpose for which Christ gave it to him. The effect was to make evident his need for grace and to draw him closer to Christ. Its purpose was to powerfully display the full sufficiency of Christ's grace to meet all our needs in time and for eternity. His grace was sufficient! If Christ's grace was sufficient to meet all Paul's needs of body and spirit, bring him through every trial and suffering of life, His grace will be sufficient to meet every need in our lives and bring us to eternal life. As Paul said in the letter to the Romans, nothing in life and not even death, is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. His grace is sufficient, His grace is dynamite in the lives of those who believe.

Paul was blessed to experience Christ in His glory. He experienced Christ's power fully in his weakness. Christ appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus in bright light that pierced his eyes and a divine voice that rattled his eardrums. In a heavenly vision, Christ showed Paul things that defy human description. Paul heard words that no man can utter, but he experienced the fullness of Christ's power in grace through his weakness. We don't like weakness. We want to be strong. We don't like infirmity. We want to be strong and able. We don't want hardship. We want a life of ease. The prayer of Jabez in 1 Chronicles, who asked God to keep him from suffering, is in all our hearts, if not on our lips. But remember Jesus' words to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

The thorn in Paul's flesh may not be identified, so that we may better identify our own afflictions with the sufferings of Christ. Regardless of the nature of the thorn in his flesh, it was bad enough that three times he pleaded for Christ to take it away. Paul wasn't the only one to have such a trial. Jesus experienced a similar thing in the Garden, when three times He pleaded with His Father to take away the cup of suffering He would drink to atone for the sin of the world. In Christ we are never alone in our weakness, or powerless in our suffering. He is present with His all-availing grace to sustain us. He will see us through to the time and place when there will be no more mourning, crying or pain, and God wipes the tears from every eye.

Christ doesn't take us out of our sufferings, He joins us in them. His grace is sufficient to meet our needs. Christ doesn't stand off in the distance in our afflictions. He draws us close to Himself. He gives us His power to endure. His grace is sufficient to meet all our needs. We experience the dynamic power of His grace in our weakness and see that it is more than sufficient to meet our needs in time and eternity. He expressed His grace in His own weakness and suffering. We experience the true power of His grace as He joins us in our sufferings. When we join our afflictions to the afflictions of Christ, we see that the sufficiency is not ours or from us, but from Christ Jesus. His grace is sufficient. His grace is dynamite in the lives of those who believe. "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness."

May Jesus continue to bless us with His grace in the word, in the washing of Holy Baptism and in the sacrament of His holy body and precious blood, that His power may rest upon us now in time and be displayed fully and forever in eternity. In His Name. Amen